

[Ellis Petty]

Range-lore

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Maverick, Texas Folk stuff - Range lore

RANGE-LORE

Ellis Petty was born in Brown County, on Salt Creek, August 6, 1874. He tells the following story of his ranching experiences:

"I helped make my first cattle drive when only twelve years of age. My father's outfit drove a herd of cattle from Bell County to Brady in 1886 and took me along. It wasn't a long drive and we didn't have any serious trouble, but I thought it was a big trip. I can remember I had a grand time, but I sure got tired, and sometimes scared. The riders would tell ghost or Indian stories around the fire every night and I wouldn't have been surprised to see a band of Indian warriors or some of their dead victims make an attack on us at any time. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 "When I was about fifteen I went to work for my grandmother's (S 3bars) ranch in Brown County. She had a pretty big outfit, and kept a lot of horses. The country was for the most part open range then; however, they were beginning to fence some of it. There was one good bronc buster working for grandmother while I was there. His name was Cooke. He made a good cowhand when necessary, but his trade was bronc riding. He contracted to break horses and he sure got some tough ones sometimes. I don't believe old Booger Red had anything on him. I know another good rider, Oran Webb, for many years a cowhand and stockman in Runnels County. He was a good all around rider, and was well known in these parts for his nery riding.

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"The women all rode on side-saddles in early days. My wife rode a side-saddle to her wedding and on her honey-moon trip. Some of the girls were good riders. Mrs. Coffey was about the best one I knew.

"I worked for my father-in-law, J. M. Franks, for some time. His ranch was on the line of Coryell and Bosque Counties. I practically lived in the saddle. I remember one drive we made from Coryell to a point south, and west. We crossed the Colorado River at Red Bluff crossing and we were nearly a month making the drive. The cattle were thin and we grazed them along as we went. It rained a lot on us and the Colorado and other streams got up, the Colorado staying up for many days. When it finally ran down enough that we could swim across, we carried the cattle across a few at a time. 3 "They'd razz the new hands, especially green riders, in them days something terrible. "Toadies," one bunch dubbed them. It was the old hand's delight to get 'em on a buckin' horse and see them get thrown off.

"I was just a lad of a boy, but I can remember something about the wire cutting period. They had quite a lot of trouble over it in Brown and other counties in that country. It took a long time for people to live down those differences, too.

"When we made a cattle drive to Brady in 1886, we camped one night right on a line fence of a feller's pasture that had been lately fenced in. We didn't know it that night, but the fence cutters came in the night and cut his wires all to pieces. We saw many places next morning where the wires had been cut.

"In them days many of the small men would hire to a big stockman and although he worked his cattle too, he would be drawing wages from the big man all the time. It is said that many times these little men would brand lots of the bosses' calves for themselves, in fact were rustlers. Well, of course fencing the land let them out. Many of the cutters, especially the leaders, were just such men. But, on the other hand, the man that could afford it would buy up a lot of land and often fence in a small man that had improved a little

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place and perhaps lived on it for several years. There were good men and unfair ones, too, on both sides.

“One man, a prominent stockman, got a hint his fence was going to be cut on a certain night and he had the Texas Rangers 4 lying in wait when they came. When they attempted to arrest the cutters they began shooting. One of their bunch was killed and another wounded, also a Ranger was hurt in the fight. Bill Adams was sheriff at the time and was threatened many times because he tried to keep peace. Old Bill was a good man. I worked for him awhile in his wagon yard at Brownwood. Fence cutting, or the right to fence the land, was the main political issue at the time. Should the old open range survive or could it. Every candidate had to come out on one side and there were some bitter arguments, and some almost came to blows. Many felt that it was only justice to the poor man to leave a large part, at least of school land, open for free range.”

REFERENCES

Ellis Petty, Maverick, Texas. Interviewed May 5, 1938.